

The POWER Special Session: Building Awareness of Power and Privilege on Intersectional Teams

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I. MOTIVATION

We (the facilitators) work as social scientists and engineering education researchers from different universities on the NSF-supported program, Revolutionizing Engineering Departments (RED) (<https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2017/nsf17501/nsf17501.htm>). We began to notice how power and privilege were enacted on our teams, which consisted of diverse team members (e.g., diverse in disciplinary affiliation, role in the university, gender, race, LGBTQIA+ status). This motivated a research project and workshops/special sessions such as the one proposed here, where we explore how power and privilege are enacted within interdisciplinary teams so that we can begin to dismantle systemic oppressions within academia [1], [2]. The POWER special session (Privilege and Oppression: Working for Equitable Recourse) was developed to guide engineering educators to identify and understand the intersectional nature of power and privilege before planning strategies to disrupt, disarm, and dismantle it.

II. GOALS OF THE SESSION

In this POWER special session, we will engage attendees in a protocol in which they will examine intersectionality, power, and privilege within teams so that they can begin to understand ways that systemic oppression may be influencing their team dynamics. We will frame the session around the following question: How can we become aware of power and privilege on collaborative academic teams in order to better affect social change and eventually create more inclusive teams? After engaging in the session, attendees will be able to:

1. Identify power relationships that produce boundaries and power differentials on transdisciplinary teams;
2. Evaluate the impacts power relationships may have on such teams;
3. Develop strategies for surmounting, managing, and mitigating boundaries and power differentials;
4. Collaborate more effectively across boundaries, including disciplinary boundaries, identity differences, and power imbalances; and
5. Guide their own teams using the provided protocol.

III. AUDIENCE

The primary intended audience are engineering and computer science faculty who are interested in cultivating inclusive teams. In addition, the audience could include administrators, social science faculty, postdoctoral researchers, lecturers, graduate students, and undergraduate students. This session also invites people who feel they have been excluded from inclusion efforts because they belong to a majority group. This session will help all attendees develop ways to become agents of change and to create more inclusive teams.

IV. NOVELTY OF SESSION

This special session is novel in four distinct ways:

1. Framing participants as agents of change: This includes a set of ground rules and framing special session attendees as change agents.
2. Using critical theory to frame the POWER special session: Instead of focusing exclusively at the individual level, we are integrating a discussion of systemic inequalities/ higher level power imbalances that may give rise to some of these team dynamics.
3. Using lenses of power—structural, cultural, disciplinary, interpersonal—to identify power relationships and imbalances that may be present on teams
4. Providing a facilitation guide and protocol to participants so that they can revise and run a similar special session in their own institutions.

V. DESCRIPTION OF THE POWER SPECIAL SESSION

This session begins with a framing discussion about learning together during the session. Collectively, we will explore the following question: How can we become aware of power and privilege on collaborative academic teams in order to better affect social change and eventually improve interdisciplinary and cross-identity/boundary interactions, communication, and inclusivity? Attendees will explore how their team members' social identities and academic positions reflect different cultural, historical, and epistemological communities and how they impact collaboration and effectiveness of their inter/transdisciplinary teams. Together, we will investigate the role of power and privilege in the ways in which team members' experiences and expertise are heard, appreciated, respected, and

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valued or resisted, devalued, and ignored. At the end of the POWER special session, we will provide attendees with the facilitation guide and protocol so that they can implement a version of this special session within their teams or institutions.

VI. SESSION AGENDA

We will begin with an introduction that will encourage inclusive behavior during the session (10 minutes). The introduction will also include a brief discussion of power [3], privilege [4], and intersectionality [5], [6], [7]. The session will be framed around three activities as described below:

Activity 1: Screenplay and analysis with power lenses (25 minutes).

- Read through a provided screenplay of a transdisciplinary academic team, with volunteer actors reading the screenplay and a facilitator acting as narrator.
- Work collaboratively in breakout rooms to use four lenses of power to identify some of the intersections within the scenario that may lead to power imbalances on the team.
- Report out.

Activity 2: Own Scenario (20 minutes).

- Challenge attendees to identify a specific experience from one of their trans/interdisciplinary teams.
- Work individually to use four lenses of power to identify power relationships.
- Share in breakout rooms and report out.

Activity 3: Reflect on Power & Privilege; Develop Strategies (25 minutes)

- Provide each attendee with a team change wild card that includes a detailed description of a new member who joins their team.
- Attendees consider ways that the team could react to the new team member that may limit the new member's meaningful participation.
- Attendees act as change agents and create strategies that they could enact to help mitigate potential issues, including division of labor.
- Attendees fill out the provided strategies table that includes ideas from the two bullet points above.

At the conclusion of the session, the facilitators will provide access to the facilitation guide and protocol to attendees.

VII. FACILITATORS' POSITIONALITIES

As members of RED teams who fulfill different leadership roles within our respective teams, we have diverse experiences observing and experiencing power and privilege within our teams. While we are all white women, we each have different personal and professional identities that influence the way we experience our teams. For example, Nadia's stated role on her team is social scientist, but she is also a tenured disciplinary faculty within the engineering program and an engineering

education researcher (and graduate program chair). Vanessa is the engineering education researcher on her team, but also is a tenured learning scientist with an appointment in the Chemical Engineering department that is the focus of their RED project. Susannah is a postdoctoral researcher on her team and has a background as a social scientist and expertise in organizational change. Also, some aspects of our personal identities position us in a place of privilege (e.g., being white), while also experiencing marginalization (e.g., being women).

VIII. FUTURE WORK

After engaging in this session, we hope that attendees will begin to approach transdisciplinary teams differently with an understanding of the intersecting identities of people within their teams alongside the power imbalances and structural inequalities. We invite attendees to join us in our work to begin to identify and dismantle systemic oppressions found in engineering education and academia more broadly.

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